Vietnam Veterans Start Nixon Drive

By Tim O'Brien
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A group of Vietnam veterans yesterday kicked off a campaign to re-elect President Nixon, charging that if Democratic candidate George McGovern were to carry out his troop withdrawal program he would be guilty of "a war crime in the highest degree."

John O'Neill, an organizer of the Concerned Veterans for Nixon, said, "Sen. McGovern promises peace through massive defense cuts and through a unilateral withdrawal in Vietnam that would leave our brothers rotting in North Vietnamese jails."

Charles Collins, a former Navy officer and the group's national coordinator, charged that McGovern would commit "a war crime of the highest degree if he unilaterally pulled out all American troops from Vietnam as he has proposed."

The new veterans campaign organization claims a 30,000-man membership. About 25,000 of them belong to a year-old group called Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace, O'Neill said.

There are about 28 million veterans in the United States, six million of them from the Vietnam-era.

Collins said the group plans to "actively campaign against McGovern in all the states." He described the group as "bipartisan," saying that they will not support Republican candidates at lower levels. "We are only concerned that the President be re-elected."

John R. Todd, a former Vietnam helicopter pilot who was blinded in action, said, "The man who aspires to the presidency seems to be blinded to the realities of the war. This political blindness has caused George McGovern to forget the just cause to which he committed our nation and the millions of young Americans who fought, died or may still be captive."

He said, "McGovern has chosen to run for President on a platform of accepting the enemy's demands," while the President will run "on his record."

Forrest Lindley, a former Green Beret and Army captain who will head a McGovern drive for the veterans vote, responded yesterday that McGovern's actions, "when he is elected President, will result in the release of the prisoners, an end to the war and a big step toward allowing the Indochinese people to secure their own destiny."

"Nixon's policy," he said, "is to kill and bomb for peace, and McGovern's is not."

According to the new group's leaders, the Committee for the Re-election of the President has given no financial support to them, although "individual members" of the veterans group "may have been in contact with" the Nixon campaign staff.